

DREAMS AS A SOURCE OF IMAGERY

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
North Texas State University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Denton, Texas

December, 1979

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sleep is a basic form of human existence and a biological function of all human beings. Sleep is not merely a suspended state of nothingness, it is an active time of physiological changes, body movements, and various levels of consciousness through the process of sleeping. The dream state is as different from sleep as sleep is from the waking state. Man's existence has been divided into three basic forms: (1) an awake state, (2) sleeping, and (3) dreaming. In humans the newborn spends 50% of sleep time in a dream state, at the age of two 40%, and at the age of five 25% to 30%; during adolescence and adulthood 15% to 20% of sleeping is spent dreaming.<sup>1</sup> The commencement of dreaming is signalled by several characteristics, which are rapid eye movement, sporadic activity of certain muscles, and high brain temperatures and metabolic rates.<sup>2</sup> Further, in humans, there is an ability to recall dreams upon awakening. Rapid eye movements signal the beginning of mental activity in the form of dreams, whereas the remainder of sleep is spent in silence. The dream world has many aspects of fantasy or

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<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Jones, The New Psychology of Dreaming, (Westford Massachusetts; Murray Printing Co., 1978), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

imagination. Dreams can be defined as a series of thoughts, images, or emotions that occur during sleep. The impression of strangeness, which is certainly a characteristic of dreaming, comes from three primary sources: (1) a loosened temporal and spatial world, (2) short attentional controls and (3) fewer critical evaluations.<sup>3</sup> In dreams, time and matter are not bound by physical properties, and scenes may change with remarkable rapidity or awesome slowness. One out of three people can recall dreams upon awakening. During a night's sleep there are usually three separate dream periods per night, which contain at least two dream stories within each period.

Sleep and dreams have been a common phenomenon of man since the beginning of time. Many viewpoints have emerged during different times and cultures to explain the cause and function of dreaming. In many primitive groups, for example, the Eskimos of Hudson Bay and the Pantani Malay people, it is thought that one leaves one's body during a sleep period and enters another world. These people believe that dreams exist as a co-reality with the awakened state. One of the oldest and most persistent beliefs about dreams is that they have a prophetic character. Dreamers

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Wilse B. Webb, Sleep, The Gentle Tyranny, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 142.

in ancient times used their dreams in a special way to gain answers to their questions or to obtain cures for sickness. Sacred temples dating from the latter part of the 6th century B.C. to the latter half of the 5th century A.D. were built for the purpose of sleeping in the hope of receiving a useful dream from the gods.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the ancient dreamers, who believed they received insight from their dreams, there have been some individuals who have accomplished certain artistic creations from information they dreamed. Creative dreams can be experienced in two different ways. In the first, the dreamer observes the creative product in its totality during a dream state. In the second type, the dream only provides the mood or idea from which the creative product evolves in a waking state. One creative dreamer whose product occurred in its totality in a dream is the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. While reading a history book, Purchas His Pilgrimage, Coleridge fell asleep and experienced his famous dream which he captured in the poem "Kubla Khan".<sup>5</sup> The field of music also owes some of its famous pieces to creative dreams. Giuseppe Tartini, the Italian violinist

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia Garfield, Creative Dreaming (New York; Ballentine Books, 1976), p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

and composer, had such a dream. At the age of twenty-one, Tartini had a dream in which he sold his soul to the devil,<sup>6</sup> who seized his violin and began to play. Upon awakening, Tartini tried to recreate the music he heard in his dream. The result was the "Devil's Trill" Sonata, which he composed from a creative dream.<sup>7</sup> An example of dreams providing the inspiration for creative works is the British author, Robert Louis Stevenson, who claimed to have developed skills in dream control. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde<sup>8</sup> is a famous example of the tales he produced through dreams. Through his dreams Stevenson would receive ideas for plots which he would expand upon consciously when he awoke.

In 1924, a group of artists and poets, who referred to themselves as Surrealists, began experimentation with dreams as well as other unconscious states. The Surrealists, who were encouraged by the publication of Sigmund Freud's theories in his book The Interpretation of Dreams,<sup>9</sup> became interested in the creativity of dreaming. While the dream image is ideally a pure product of the unconscious, few

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<sup>6</sup>  
Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>7</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>  
Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>9</sup>  
Frantisek Smejkal, Surrealist Drawings (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1974), p. 18.

Surrealists derived direct inspiration from their dreams. In Giorgio di Chirico's works, dream inspiration played an important role. For instance, di Chirico recorded one of his dreams in La Révolution Surréaliste, which contains the following passage:

I am on a square of great metaphysical beauty; it is perhaps the Piazza Cavour in Florence; it may also be one of the beautiful squares in Turin, or it may be neither the one nor the other; on one side porticos can be seen and above them apartments with closed shutters and ceremonial balconies. On the horizon appear hills with villas; above the square the sky is very clear, washed by the storm, yet one is aware that the sun is setting, for the shadows of the houses and of the occasional passers-by are very long.<sup>10</sup>

This dream is similar to di Chirico's visual recordings of Italian piazzas. There are other references to dreams in di Chirico's writings. In the poem "On Life," for instance, one can find the words: "And what is the meaning of the dream about the iron artichokes?"<sup>11</sup> These artichokes form an important and repetitive motif in his drawings.

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<sup>10</sup>

Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>11</sup>

Ibid.



## CHAPTER II

### DREAMS AS A SOURCE OF IMAGERY

In this creative project I explored my internal world of dream images as a source of imagery in my work. By my use of the term dream images, I refer to the images that are revealed in dreams, excluding daydreams or fantasies from my research. Similarly to the Surrealists in their experiments with dreams, I was only concerned with what I dreamed, not how or why, and eliminated any attempt to interpret my dreams. My only concern during this project was for my ability to transfer unconscious dream images consciously into pictorial representation. Dream images were either transferred into visual depiction or they provided the mood or idea from which the creative product evolved in a waking state. Deviations from the dreams were used only to translate the dream into visual terms.

There are two types of dreams that can be used as sources of ideas. One type is an induced dream, similar to the method of dream control that Robert Louis Stevenson used to produce ideas through dreams. The dream is planned by conscious thoughts immediately prior to going to sleep. By posing questions, the content of dreams can be influenced. The second type occurs naturally without conscious pre-

sleep suggestion.

The images in my project are from natural dreams and not the result of conscious pre-determined thoughts. I did not try to influence the images in my dreams but allowed them to evolve spontaneously. I selected this method of dreaming in an effort to determine if there would be a natural reoccurring of dream images.

## CHAPTER III

### SOURCE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

I have been amused at some of my dreams in the past and can still recall some unrecorded childhood dreams. But to establish a consistent method of dream research, I conditioned myself to recall my dreams upon awakening and to record them in writing and sketches to aid in remembering later. As I made daily records, I found that there were very few mornings when I awoke without a vivid dream to record in my journal. This method of gathering research data became automatic with practice and allowed greater efficiency and accuracy in recollection.

There were some aspects of dreams that seemed impossible to describe. Some dreams I have experienced included images which change from one form into another; for instance, a crab became a bird and flew away. At other times the setting would shift while I continued the same action. Then there were some dreams in which the shifts were more complex and almost beyond my ability to express. Everything seemed to be happening simultaneously, or there were several levels of dream action and all were occurring at once. When a dream seemed impossible to describe, I stated what I could of it and tried to identify the elusive images

of the dream. After my dreams were recorded in descriptive narratives and sketches, it was possible for me to translate them into the final expression in either pencil, paint, or sculpture.

During this research project I collected and recorded forty-five dreams. From these written descriptions I selected the dreams which contained the most vivid or unusual images for visual representation. In all, twenty works were accomplished which correspond with certain dreams from my journal. Included in the twenty works, I arbitrarily decided to use ten of the dreams in drawings, eight in paintings, and two in sculpture.

## CHAPTER IV

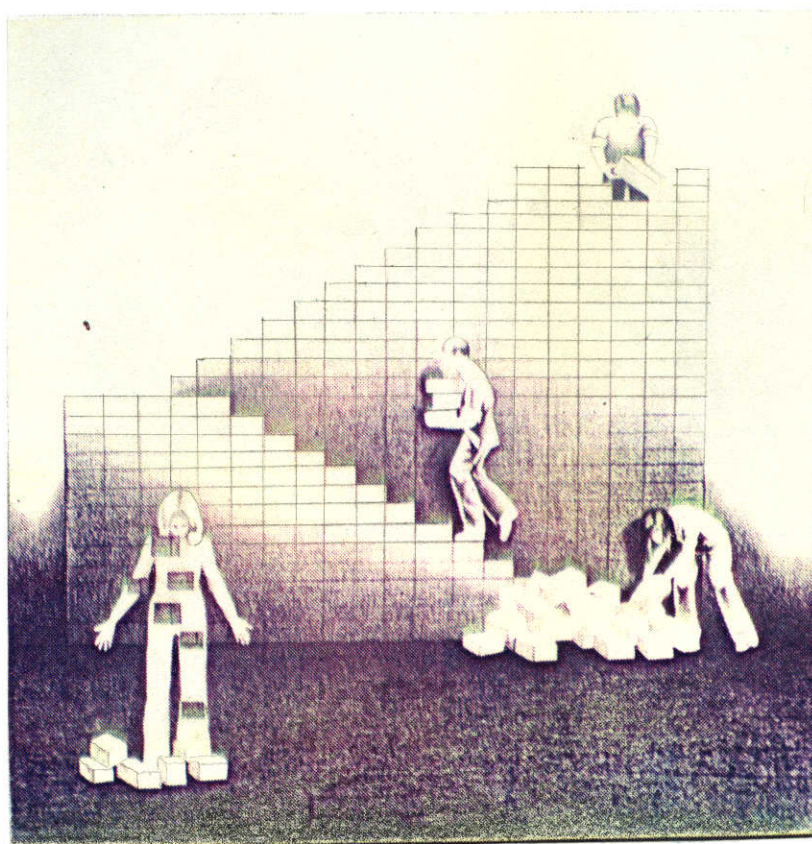
### DISCUSSION OF THREE VISUAL DREAM EXPRESSIONS

To explain the transformation of a dream into visual representation I have chosen three dreams and their visual counterparts to discuss. I will describe the dream and explain the process I experienced in transferring it into a visual expression. Also, an example has been selected from each of the different means of expression used in this project: pencil, paint, and sculpture. The first dream to be discussed was recorded as follows:

I was walking down a vacant street when I began to fall apart and blocks of myself fell to the ground. Upon the realization of what was happening I felt very curious and even amused. I turned my head and looked behind me and saw in the distance unknown people picking up blocks and stacking them as if they were trying to build a wall. As I stood and watched them build I became concerned that they would take my blocks. Everything was dark except for unexplainable light sources which revealed the objects or people I saw.

Color was either nonexistent or insignificant in this dream so I decided to do the visual expression in pencil. Some of my dreams have been in color, while in others color is merely seen in an isolated image. Dreams of limited color are ideal for expression in pencil. The drawing that evolved from this dream closely corresponds with the images

## BLOCKS



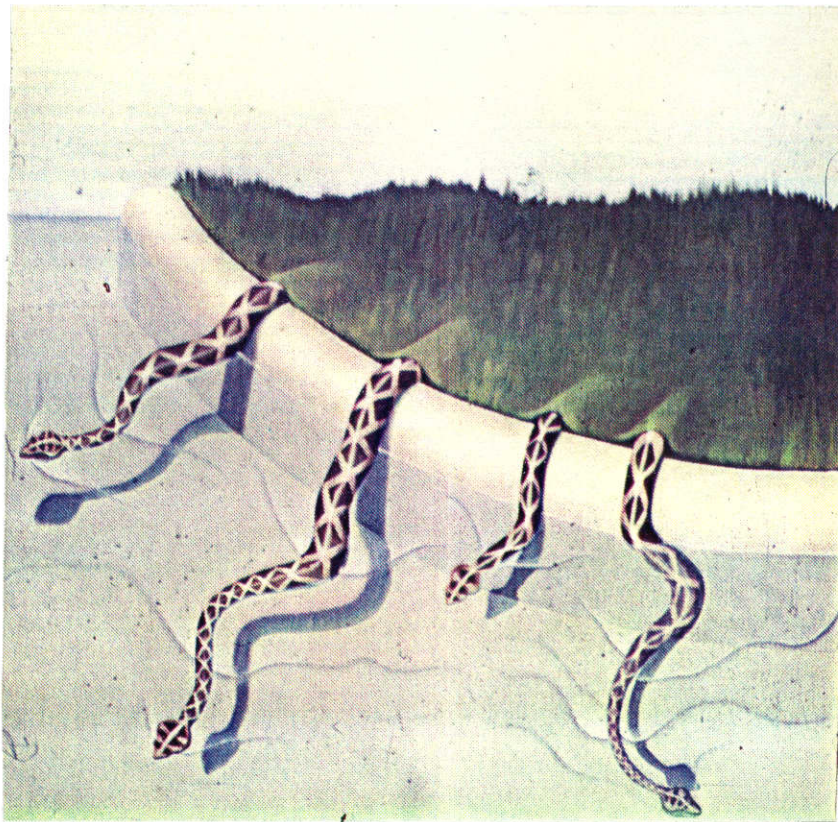
that were experienced. In the drawing I placed myself in the foreground viewing on the ground the fallen blocks, which had left empty spaces where they once belonged. In the background I chose to reveal three people without facial features who are busy amassing a pile of blocks and transferring them into a tall wall. The drawing is shrouded in darkness except for myself, the three people, the fallen blocks, and the height of the wall.

The next example was taken from the following dream:

It was daylight and I was walking down a street that had flooded. I began to wade in the clear ankle-deep water when I approached a house with a curbed patio. As I stepped on the curb, the green grass gave under my weight and several large brown snakes slithered out from under the freshly edged grass. When the snakes reached the water they began to increase their speed. The snakes cast dark shadows which for a minute made it difficult to know how many there were.

Though there were other images in this dream, I decided to focus on the snakes fleeing from their hiding places. In the dream they were the most pronounced image and also the most vividly recalled. The powerful impression of the snakes influenced my decision to portray this particular dream in paint to avoid the size limitation of paper. Also the presence of color made this dream adaptable for use as a painting. In this painting I depicted four brown snakes with a repetitive diamond shaped pattern, emerging from under a carpet of green grass, down a curb and into the

## SNAKES





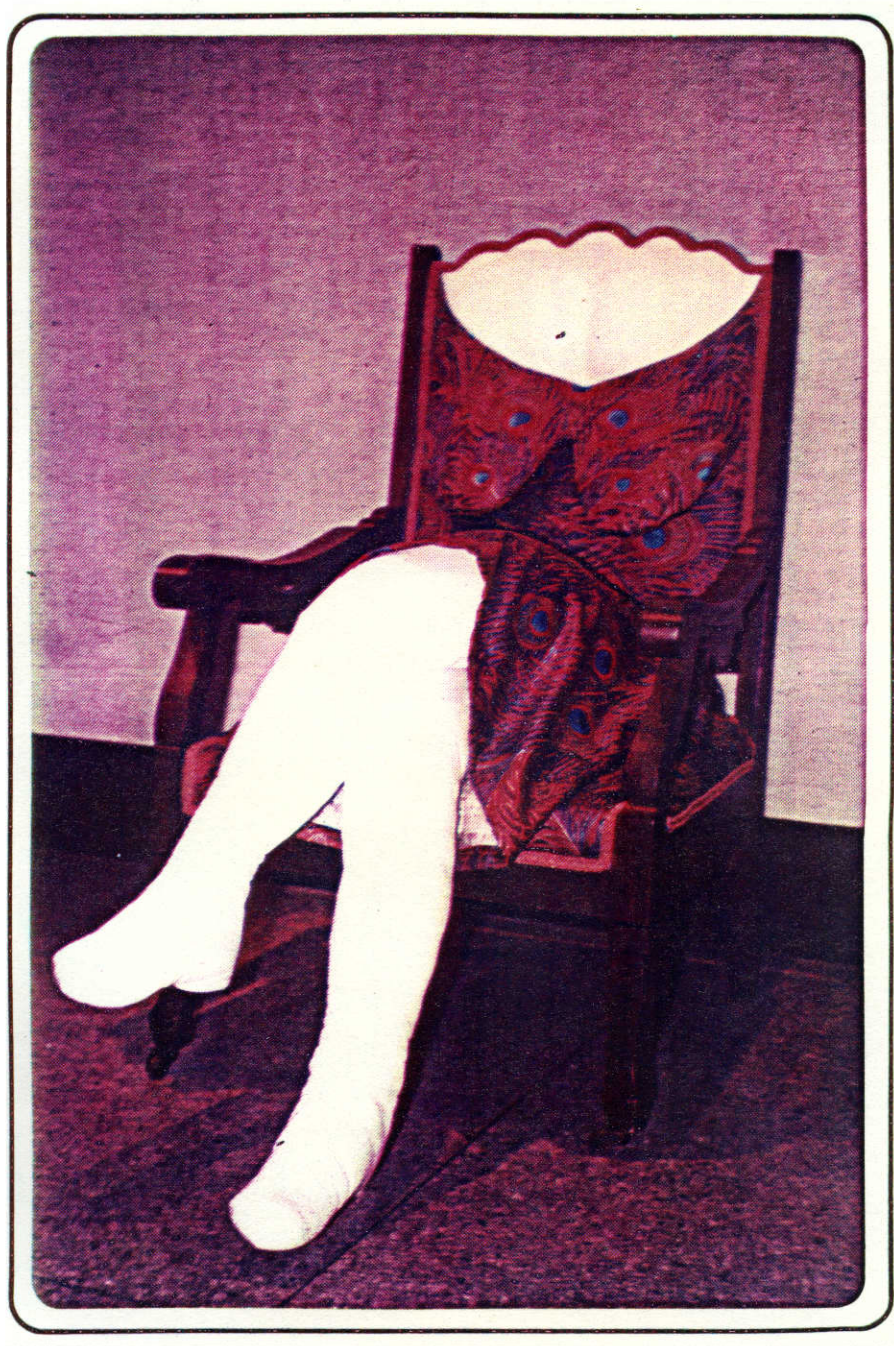
shallow water. The snakes are casting a solid blue grey shadow on the flooded street, identical to their shape.

The last dream was recorded as the following:

I found myself in a dark room where there were people sitting in chairs in a circle. There was a strong light source but because of its positioning it revealed only the people from about the neck down excluding their faces. I identified someone in the circle as myself even though I viewed the people from the outside of the circle. Then the people began to speak and from their voices I could recognize who they were. But their voices kept changing making it difficult to determine who they were from one minute to the next. I identified a woman's torso and voice as being someone I know because she was sad and I began to feel guilty. I wanted to stay hidden in the darkness.

The light source which only revealed the torsos and legs of people sitting in chairs created an interesting effect. This image fascinated me and spurred the idea of creating a headless human form in an actual chair, almost as if the chair had merged with the lower torso and legs of a human. I decided to use the image of the woman in the dream for use in a sculpture. The "human chair" was constructed out of an actual chair with the use of stuffing the upholstery in the shape of a female form. The image of the legs was made of material which was sewn in the shape of legs and stuffed with cotton. These legs were then attached to the seat of the chair.

## HUMAN CHAIR



## CHAPTER V

### SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

Through the execution of this research project I have concluded that dreams can be used as a useful source of imagery. But an accurate visual depiction of my dreams did not assure me of a successful drawing, painting or sculpture. Works of art can be suggested by dreams but not exclusively dream compositions. At the start of this research project I found myself torn between capturing the events and images of my dreams and achieving what I determined to be a successful piece. For to create a work of art is to produce a certain result from a deliberate intent with the appropriate materials and in accordance with artistic criteria. During the execution of certain visual recreations liberties needed to be taken to transform private personal dream images into intelligible and esthetic expressions. Even with the liberties that I established for myself in this creative project, more freedom was needed. My sleep state is not as uniquely creative as my mental processes while awake.

Since dreams utilize all of man's five senses, not every dream recorded in my journal could be transformed into visual compositions. Some dreams dealt exclusively

with experiences other than those associated with sight. For example, some dreams dealt entirely with emotional experiences such as anger or verbal conversations. Dreams which contained limited visual images were unsatisfactory to me for use as a source of imagery in this research project.

However, one successful outcome of this project was an awareness of personally significant images which were revealed to me through my dreams. Several images reoccurred numerous times in my journal. In a majority of my dreams I dreamed it was dark except for lighted images. Light was an important aspect in many of my recorded dreams. In some the moon provided light, while in others unexplainable light sources gave images emphasis. Water was another reoccurring image found in my dreams. Its appearance occurred in many forms from an ocean scene to a human fountain. Also animals and insects appeared frequently and were expressive in their actions or appearance. These reoccurring images were transformed into the final visual representations along with other images which appeared in isolated dreams. In completing this group of works, I have confirmed that for me, as for the Surrealists before me, dreams are an unlimited source for significant visual creations.

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